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Rules H.R. 1268, Providing for Consideration of Emergency Supplemental

Appropriations Act for Defense, the Global War on Terror, and Tsunami Relief, 2005

Mr. Speaker, this is the third major supplemental appropriations bill Congress has considered for Iraq and Afghanistan. A war and reconstruction that the administration told us could be completely financed by Iraqi oil revenues has cost the American taxpayer a staggering \$275 billion, and the end is nowhere in sight. As the price of this war continues to climb, we can no longer afford to ignore the equally expansive "accountability" gap that has developed in the White House.

Harry Truman was famous for saying the buck stops here. After all, he was the President, and to him that meant he had to take responsibility for his government. He was accountable to the people he served.

But time and again our current President has demonstrated his unwillingness to be held accountable for any decision, or commitment or blunder of his administration. And what is particularly disappointing is the willingness of the Republican leadership to assist the administration in its need to avoid accountability.

Let me give an example. The gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. Tierney) came before the Committee on Rules last night, offered an amendment which would have established a select committee to follow up on a very disturbing report just released from the Inspector General's Office. The report indicates that \$9 billion spent on Iraqi reconstruction is unaccounted for and no one knows where it is.

In one case, the Inspector General raised the possibility that thousands of ghost employees were on one unnamed ministry's payroll. In another case, a firm was allegedly paid \$15 million to provide security during civilian flights into Baghdad even though no planes flew during the term of the contract. In another case, a Pentagon contract for the development of bulletproof armor was given to a "former Army researcher who had never mass-produced anything," and according to the New York Times, the researcher tried for a year to meet the order and finally was forced to give up completely.

These types of incidents squander precious resources, waste time we often do not have, and place American's lives at risk.

Mr. Speaker, we heard of another report just this morning that Halliburton has overcharged us, according to the Pentagon, by \$100 million.

The Tierney amendment would have established a House select committee to further investigate the allegations; much like the successful Truman Committee was established during the Second World War. The Committee on Rules

Democrats tried to get the amendment made in order because we expect accountability from our government, but we were voted down on a party-line vote. Why?

No one can reasonably suggest that this body does not have time to get to the bottom of these unresolved issues. After all, we spend on average only 2 days a week in this Chamber, and half the time we do spend here we are renaming Post Offices and honoring foreign dignitaries, and a few athletic endeavors.

If we have enough time for that, we certainly have enough time to track down \$9 billion that the administration seems to have misplaced. We have the time and energy to address rampant corruption in the way our contracts in Iraq are being administered. Certainly we have the will to infuse some accountability into the process, but apparently the leadership does not have the time or the will and truly demonstrates the hypocrisy of those in the majority who say they are for saving taxpayer money, except when it is being wasted by their administration. But it raises a more important question, and that is if we in this body will not hold the White House accountable for losing \$9 billion, then who will? If it is not our job in this Chamber, then whose is it?

There is another disturbing aspect to the lack of accountability in Iraq contracting. The administration was supposed to issue two reports detailing spending on both military operations and reconstruction activities in Iraq. That was done by law, one of the reports due on October 31, 2004, the other due January 1, 2005. Neither report has ever been delivered to the Congress.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Defense has a legal obligation to provide the reports to Congress and they are breaking the law by not providing them. The majority in this body is breaking its bond of trust with the American people by not demanding these reports and with them a measure of accountability for their administration.

The American people expect the leadership of this Congress to be more than a rubber stamp for an administration that has shown itself to be secretive and dishonest time and time again. We have a responsibility to our fellow Americans, to our Constitution, to ensure that all branches of the government are held accountable to the American people.

And speaking of accountability, this supplemental increases the military death gratuity from \$12,000 to \$100,000 and subsidized life insurance benefits from \$250,000 to \$400,000 for families of soldiers who died or were killed on active duty from October 7, 2001.

This is critical language which does two important things for our fighting men and women: Expands their life insurance and increases their death benefits. But what happened, these benefits, which will be legislating on an appropriation bill, require protection from the Committee on Rules against a point of order on the floor of the House. Sadly, the leadership refused to grant that protection in this rule, and those two measures are left open to a point of order.

Therefore, any single Member of this body can stand up and knock out those provisions without any debate, without any vote, without any opportunity for dissent. This was no accident. Clearly the rule was written this way by design because we had to wait to get the rule after they completed those negotiations.

And why are the benefits of our fighting men and women not worthy of protection? The sad truth is these men and women have the courage to protect us with their lives, and yet some in this Chamber do not have the courage to protect them with even a vote on the House floor.

The Republican leadership has resorted to setting up a point of order to ensure the benefit increases never make it into law because they do not have the courage to vote it down themselves and they do not want to be accountable for the vote.

The bill also includes funding for body armor, armored Humvees, electronic jammers and other necessary items to protect our troops which are long overdue. But as we listen to Member after Member rising to pay homage to the sacrifice of our fighting forces, I want my fellow Americans to remember who was willing to sacrifice those men and women on the House floor today.

I also want them to remember two very important amendments which were not made in order by the Committee on Rules. The amendments by the gentlewoman from Oregon (Ms. Hooley) and the gentlewoman from Connecticut (Ms. DeLauro) would have expanded veterans' health care and mental health care, but they were not included in the bill.

Mr. Speaker, that is why at the conclusion of the debate I will ask Members to defeat the previous question to the rule so we can get a vote on the Hooley and DeLauro amendments and so we can move to protect the language in the bill which increases the benefits for our military personnel.

Our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines are over in Iraq today risking their lives to protect America and the world. The least we can do is provide them with decent health care when they return. Once we vote, our fellow Americans will know exactly where we all stand on health care for our veterans despite the rhetoric and legislative tricks, and that is what I like to call held accountable.